



## EXODUS, PART 27

### THE FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT

#### Exodus 18.13-27

Last week, we looked at the first part of Chapter 18 and we first saw the reunion of Moses with his wife and children whom he had not seen in many months along with his father-in-law, Jethro.

After their reunion there was a recounting of all that God had done for Israel from their deliverance from Egypt up through their victory over the Amalekites.

Remember that Jethro is referred to as “the priest of Midian.” He was a priest who served many gods, not just one. However, after Moses’ testimony of all that God had done for the people of Israel, Jethro had a change of mind and heart concerning the person of Jehovah.

In other words, Moses’ testimony led Jethro to repentance, followed by the confession that Jehovah is Lord over all.

All of this was followed in v. 12 with a revival of sorts. Aaron brought the elders of Israel and shared with Moses and Jethro in making sacrifices and communion around the table of fellowship.

The second half of this chapter tells us about the reorganization of the government of Israel. If you will notice, the government of Israel was formed in the context of sacrifice and worship and godly communion. Once men got their hearts right with God, the government of the nation began to run smoothly and efficiently.

Following their day of worship, on the first day of the week, Jethro decided to stay around for a while and observe the work of Moses. Since the administration of the nation of Israel was of no immediate or direct concern to Jethro, we might ask what prompted him to get involved in the matters of Israel’s government.



After all, for a father-in-law to step in and try to tell his son-in-law how to manage his affairs carries the potential of creating an explosive and divisive situation.

Jethro may have already been aware that some problem existed within the nation. For one thing, Moses had sent his family to live with Jethro as he went out to do the work of God. Not only that, but there was little or no communication over the next several months between Moses and his family. Jethro may have been asking himself why this was the case.

Observing Moses in action as leader of the nation, Jethro may have felt he had discovered the problem.

In the first place, Moses needed to realize that he was acting like a one-man band – like a lone-ranger leader, trying to do everything himself – as if everything depended on him instead of on God. Moses was a man of compassion and concern, but he had let his concern for the welfare of the people blind him to the fact that he was first of all a servant of God before he was a servant of the people.

Moses tended to believe that every problem that he heard about became his personal responsibility to solve and became so involved with individual cases that he seem to forget that his first responsibility was to the nation as a whole.

Jethro realized that, if Moses continued on this path, he would destroy not only himself, but the people as well who would soon weary of such poor leadership.

When Jethro confronted Moses about this problem, Moses replied that he had two major responsibilities (**v. 15-16**):

1. To instruct the people in the things of God
2. To arbitrate in cases of dispute



The problem as Jethro explained was that the methods that Moses was using to accomplish his purposes were bound to fail. It was time-consuming and laborious, inefficient and exhausting for both Moses and the people who had to stand all day long just to reach the place where Moses was seated to have him hear their case.

Jethro did not doubt that Moses was a great man, with a great heart for the people, who was faithful to God and to his duties. He was patient and enduring when dealing with the people and showed great forbearance in the face of overwhelming complaining and murmuring.

Yet even the best leader with the best plan he may devise for operation is subject to missing something. No pastor is perfect and no ministry plan is without room for improvement.

A lesser man might have been easily offended by the recommendations from an outsider, especially when the one giving the advice is an in-law. Yet without any indication of offense or of pride in his position, Moses listened with interest to the observations of his father-in-law.

This advice from Jethro was made even more acceptable to Moses when Jethro included a reference to the will of God. Look with me at **verses 19 and 23**.

v. 19 “**may God be with you**” – more of a prayer than a greeting

v. 23 “**If you do as I have instructed you, and if God approves of the method, then you will find peace.**”

In other words, Jethro did not presume to know more than the leader appointed by God, but only to serve as an instrument of God in facilitating the mission that God had assigned Moses in leading the people of Israel.



Moses must consult God about this advice, but, if God does approve, then here is how Moses could improve his ministry.

Jethro agreed that Moses' job was two-fold, but he elaborated on those responsibilities in **v. 19-20**.

1. **v. 19** Moses is to represent the people and their cases to God
2. **v. 20** He is to instruct the people
  - statutes or decrees – specific enactments by God
  - laws – general enactments by God
  - the way they must walk – lifestyle and worldview
  - the work they must do – their calling and the work that each must do

God's ideal for the leader of a nation is one that is a strong leader – not strong in the sense of a king, or dictator, or a political autocrat, but one...

- who is strong in his faith
- who is reliant on God for guidance
- who is faithful in obedience to God and to His laws of justice and morality

He must realize that he is not capable of carrying the load of government on his shoulders alone. Thus he must establish a staff of men to help carry this load and to serve both God and the people of the nation.

The people were to be organized according to a decimal system of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands with these men being given



responsibility for the care of those assigned to them, with Moses as the final court of appeal.

Most commentators believe that these men were not simply appointed by Moses to these positions, but that they were elected by the people. An example of this process can be read in Deut. 1.

In verse 21, Jethro defined who these men must be who held these positions of leadership:

1. **capable** – having a natural aptitude for fairness and justice
2. **fear God** – believe in God and revere Him above all else, giving consideration of His will in all their decision making
3. **men of truth** – trustworthy; men who seek after the truth and abhor a lie
4. **hate covetousness** – unwilling to even consider a bribe; men who hated all dishonest gain

The result of such an organization would be a strengthening of leadership, a strengthening of the people, and peace (**v. 23**).

One of the most amazing features of this story is that Moses listened to his father-in-law and followed his advice. Thus we discover that the very rudiments of Jewish government – as well as the roots of our own government – can be traced to this ruler from the pagan tribe of Midian.

Some have argued that what Jethro proposed and Moses accepted established the separation of executive responsibilities between the sacred and the secular.

- Moses would take care of the sacred and the religious by taking the concerns of the people to God and then instructing the people in God's law and requirements for living a moral life.



- The elders or these “capable men” would handle the secular problems, including Moses only when they could not reach a satisfactory decision.

But the separation was not between sacred and secular, but according to difficulty. The easier cases would be taken care of at the lower levels of ten people or families, and the more difficult cases appealed up the line until they eventually reached the desk of Moses if necessary.

The truth is that, for Israel, there was no separation of justice and righteousness.

#### **Cole:**

All justice was sacred to Israel. The administration of justice, of whatever kind, is here set in the context of sacrifice and sacred meal.

In other words, Jethro himself realized that there can be no peace among the nation when there is separation of church and state. That is why it was so important for him to remind Moses that he must consult God before initiating such a sweeping change in the way the government of Israel was organized.

Jethro realized that, when God is eliminated from the picture, the void is immediately filled by the forces of evil and what is good becomes bad and what is bad is elevated as morally superior.

That is why...

- That is why there have been 55 million unborn babies murdered in our country since the Roe v. Wade ruling of 1973 and why our president approves the killing of even those babies that survive the process of abortion
- That is why Hobby Lobby and other Christian-owned businesses are struggling to maintain their existence in this



- fight to prevent the government from dictating that they must violate their Christian beliefs to maintain their businesses.
- That is why Louis Giglio was dis-invited to give the benediction at tomorrow's inauguration ceremonies with an Episcopal pastor whose church is gay-affirming and blesses gay and lesbian unions.
- That is why the percentage of Americans who believe homosexuality is a sin has decreased significantly in a year, according to a survey by LifeWay Research, from 44% to 37% while the number who responded that they were unsure has increased from 13% to 17%.
- That is why 73% of evangelical leaders in America, including men like Leith Anderson, President of the National Association of Evangelicals, and William Hamel, President of the Evangelical Free Church of America, believe that the answer to violence in America is more gun-control legislation instead of a call for repentance and a turning to God by the leadership of our states and our nation.

When Jethro realized the error that Moses was making, he let Moses know about it.

And when Moses heard the counsel of his father-in-law, he listened and changed his methods, bringing comfort and peace to the nation.

If we are to have peace in our country, we, too, must experience a revival that is preceded by repentance. But we are also to be reminded that repentance comes from the experience of faith which is the gift of God granted through the hearing of God's spoken word.



It is for that reason that Jesus left us with the Great Commission that, as we go through our daily lives, we are to teach the things that He taught and to baptize those who would follow after His calling.